



We're all about being human.

House Health Care Committee – Alternatives to the ED

Public Hearing Testimony 22 February 2023

Kelsey Stavseth, Executive Director

Good Morning,

My name is Kelsey Stavseth, and I serve as the Executive Director at Northeast Kingdom Services, the Designated Agency serving the Northeast Kingdom (Orleans, Essex and Caledonia Counties). I am here to support the Therapeutic Alternatives to Emergency Department in the Northeast Kingdom for \$1,588,229 as specified in the Governor's budget.

We are calling our ED alternative the 'Front Porch' and its purpose is to provide a specialized mental health treatment facility and programming, specifically for individuals experiencing suicidal ideation or in a mental health crisis in the Northeast Kingdom with expanded availability to other community members, statewide. This facility will provide crisis stabilization, best practice interventions such as Dialectical Behavioral Therapy (DBT), Collaborative Assessment and Management of Suicidality (CAMS), and other clinically indicated supports. Staffing at this facility will include licensed clinical professionals, direct service professionals, and peers with access to nursing, psychiatric, and medication management services.

This facility will provide a community-based option for those in crisis and divert individuals experiencing a mental health crisis away from emergency departments. In doing so, this facility will provide a more person-centered and therapeutic setting for stabilization, interventions, treatment and referrals for follow up care. This program would fill a substantial gap in the current continuum of care and alleviate the strain on other community partners like our hospitals, emergency responders and law enforcement. It also aligns with Northeast Kingdom Human Services' other established programs, like the 988 Crisis Call Center, Mobile Crisis and CRT programming, which would improve the overall efficacy of already established community services.

There has long been a need for expanded mental health supports in the Northeast Kingdom, specific, but not limited to suicide prevention. Current services for acute stabilization and treatment are limited. When people in crises seek out support, they often call 911 where first responders currently have no other option but to transport to the emergency department at the local hospitals. Hospital employees are not adequately prepared to treat suicidality or mental health crises and the environment in emergency rooms are neither therapeutic nor adequate and can often traumatize, escalate or worsen the situation. A designated mental health crisis center would provide mental health specific supports by trained professionals in a therapeutic environment.

Northeast Kingdom Human Services has designed a freestanding, 24/7/365 Front Porch Crisis Care+ (FPCC+) treatment center with open access and immediate response for adults and families experiencing mental health crises. The center will create the most appropriate door for accessing supports and treatment. Those in a mental health crisis seeking help through 911, 988, or hospitals, could be diverted, as appropriate, to this facility. The treatment facility would also be open for 'walk-in' supports, mirroring programs like Mental Health Urgent Care Initiatives (MUCI) and Psychological Urgent Care for Kids (PUCK).

This treatment facility would be a priority drop off support for first responders supporting individuals in acute mental health crisis. The person in crisis would be welcomed to the Front Porch Crisis Care+ (FPCC+) hub to meet with a professional or peer, take time to acclimate to the facility, and feel safe and heard. There will be an array of modalities to support the individual when they are ready.

Accountabilities, Outcomes and Metrics

Creating and establishing a mental health treatment center in the Northeast Kingdom would have an immediate positive effect. Adding this support to an already established continuum of care would improve the following:

- Provide a comprehensive array of services for both adults and youth.
- Reduce the number of people using the Emergency Department (ED) for Mental Health supports
 - If people entered the ED as a first step, they could, if medically cleared, transfer immediately to the FPCC+ facility.
- Same Day Access - Provide onsite treatment, like DBT and CAMS-care, for suicidal ideation
- Access to Peer supports
- 24/7 telephone access
- 24/7 walk-in services
- 1-hour drive for residents in our catchment area
- Safe, supportive, therapeutically appropriate observation of voluntary people in a mental health crisis for up to 10 days
- Designed for people receiving services to move smoothly in any direction through the continuum of care

In addition to supporting the funding for this project, we also propose a 10% Medicaid Rate Increase to stabilize current staffing and enabling us, as well as the other DAs, to respond to an increasing need for supports. This project is only strengthened by the strength of our other programs, as they all work to enhance each other.

Having a solid continuum of care will ensure that people, who need the right supports, at the right time, will not end up in the emergency department. The Front Porch Program is closely tied to the success of our other programs, which need rate increase to fill significant vacancies. It is a worth investment in upstream, preventative services, which ultimately saves money in the system of care.

Thank you for your time and consideration.